

Memorandum to the File  
Case Closure  
Alleged Misuse of Travel Funds St. Louis VA Medical Center  
St. Louis, MO (2011-04189-1Q-0048)

The VA OIG Office of Audits and Evaluations referred an allegation to VA OIG Administrative Investigations Division that [redacted] St. Louis VA Medical Center (VAMC), misused VA travel funds when she incurred expenses for dual hotels on a single day on two separate occasions and incurred unnecessary lodging expenses while on long term TDY. To assess this allegation, we interviewed [redacted] current [redacted] and formerly [redacted] and [redacted] and non-VA employees. We also reviewed email, personnel, and travel records as well as Federal laws, regulations and VA policy. We addressed [redacted]s detail to the St. Louis VAMC in a separate memorandum.

(b) (7)(C)

Federal regulations state that a Federal agency may pay only those expenses essential to the transaction of official business, including transportation, per diem and miscellaneous expenses; employees must exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business, and that authorizing officials when authorizing travel must consider the need for the travel, use of travel substitutes and the most cost effective means of accomplishing travel. 41 CFR § 301-2.2, 301-2.3, and 301-71.107.

VA policy states that travelers may claim reimbursement for dual lodging on a single day and that the allowable expense for the day is the lodging cost at the end of the calendar day, and the other lodging expense incurred during that day is reimbursable as a miscellaneous travel expense when approved by the approving official. VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Travel Per Diem, Volume XIV, Chapter 2, Appendix H, Allowable Types of Lodging 7.

*Background*

Personnel records reflected that [redacted] began her VA career in [redacted] as a title 38 Student Nurse Technician and that she rose through the ranks reaching the position of [redacted] at the Salt Lake City VAMC in 2006. With [redacted]s support, [redacted] was selected for the VA SES Candidate Development Program (CDP), class of [redacted] and near the end of this training, in [redacted] [redacted] recommended her to be detailed into the [redacted] position.

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*Alleged Misuse of Travel Funds*

The allegation that [redacted] misused travel funds by claiming reimbursement for dual lodging expenses incurred on the same day was investigated and not substantiated. Personnel records reflected that [redacted] was detailed to the position of the [redacted] [redacted] from October 2009 to September 2010. Her permanent home was in [redacted]

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██████████ and acceptance of the detail required her to be on extended travel to St. Louis, MO. Personnel records reflected that ██████████ accepted the detail and that she was placed in a temporary duty (TDY) status effective October ██████████ 2009 (b) (7)(C)

Travel records reflected that during her detail, ██████████ traveled to two identified secondary TDY locations, each time keeping her primary TDY lodging in St. Louis. On each date, April 27 and September 13, 2010, she stayed in a hotel in another city.

██████████ told us that, prior to departure for her secondary TDY, personnel at her primary TDY lodging told her that if she checked out of her room, she would either lose her Government per diem rate or room availability upon her return. She said that in the interest of her primary mission and to minimize reimbursable costs to the Government, she incurred expenses for both rooms for each affected day. ██████████ told us that she consulted with VA travel specialists before incurring the additional expenses and that by doing so, she practiced prudent management of Government funds. (b) (7)(C)

OIG Audit records reflected that ██████████ checked out of her St. Louis lodging on other occasions when she traveled home or was otherwise away from the hotel.

██████████ told us that the extended TDY was personally trying and difficult for her, however, cognizant of Federal regulations requiring prudent care of Government travel funds, she always spoke to hotel management before taking weekend or secondary TDY travel to determine room rates and availability upon her return. She said that if there were no additional costs to VA, she would check out and leave her personal belongings in hotel storage until she returned. ██████████ said that in the event of Major League Baseball games or professional soccer games, room rates and availability would be unfavorable and she would not be assured of a room or the Government per diem rate when she returned, which would risk a substantial additional cost to VA. (b) (7)(C)

The St. Louis hotel billing clerk told us that, although she did not recall ██████████ specifically inquiring about room rates, it was not unusual for the Government rate to change periodically. She said that if rates were stable, long term clients either checked out and back in at a later time, or kept the room when they left for vacations or other trips away from the hotel. She said that they would not generally tell her when they did so. She further stated it was possible that hotel staff told ██████████ that room rates would increase because the St. Louis hotel maintained a 92 percent occupancy rate which could affect room availability or price. (b) (7)(C)

### *Conclusion*

We found that ██████████ twice incurred dual lodging expenses on the same day and that other times, she checked out and then back in upon her return. However, VA policy allows for employees to claim reimbursement for dual lodging on a single day when approved. We did not substantiate that ██████████ improperly paid for dual hotel rooms on the same day or incurred unnecessary lodging expenses while away from her primary TDY location. We found no evidence that she deliberately and willfully incurred additional lodging expenses reimbursable by the Government for her personal gain or (b) (7)(C)

convenience. These lodging expenses incurred while away from her primary TDY location to a secondary TDY location were necessary and prudent considering [REDACTED] would have paid more upon her return or had no room available upon her return. We are therefore closing this allegation without a formal report or memorandum.

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Prepared By: [REDACTED]

February 25, 2013

Date

Approved By: [REDACTED]

2/25/13

Date